

Employees become world travelers at Heritage Week finale

If you left JSC early for the Independence Day weekend, you missed a great time the afternoon of June 30. American Heritage Week concluded in fanfare at a grand finale event that exemplified the American spirit and our country's rich diversity.

The event had record attendance as the Gilruth Recreation Center took on a festival theme with country fair flare. Organizers did a fabulous job creating the "Visions of the past – glimpses of the future" theme, transforming the familiar Gilruth into something out of Walt Disney World's "It's a small, small world."

The ballroom was brimming with men, women and face-painted children, cotton candy in hand, perusing the booths and soaking in the sights and sounds of cultural entertainers. On stage, clad in traditional plaid, Clan Ceili, a Celtic singing and musical ensemble, treated listeners to the mystical and enchanting rhythms of their ancestors. Brightly colored costumes of the Showing Japan dance troupe mesmerized children as they twirled painted umbrellas and mimed Japanese folklore. For three hours, the entertainment continued with Egyptian Folklore cultural dancing, Conjunto Folklorico Chileno's South American folk music, and even songs in sign language.

Across the hall, the gymnasium featured reflections of our modern culture and the entertainers of tomorrow. Miss Ashley Toman, a mere 10-year-old, was a voice to be reckoned with as she belted out classic tunes ranging from the *Star Spangled Banner* to the *Yodeling Blues*. Not to be outdone was *Abraham's Tree* with summer rock classics and *LS4* and *Versatyle*, two young and fresh rhythm and blues bands.

"Our music relates to the style of R&B, which goes back to jazz and soul," said Condredge Joseph, *Versatyle* spokesman. "It is a combination of old and new culture and that is why it is very important that the group perform at these types of events – so the children can hear and enjoy their music."

The gym's futuristic theme also included the gateway to the International Space Station walk-through trailers.

The international flavor would not have been complete without the tastes and aromas of the world over. Many organizations sponsored snack booths, including mouth-watering tamales and chile con queso from the JSC Diversity Council/Equal Opportunity Programs Office; sliced sausage from Lockheed Martin; beverages from EASI; popcorn from Team NASA; and, topping it all off, a buffet of rich international desserts from United Space Alliance.

"This is my fourth year to be a part of American Heritage Day, and I'm amazed at the turnout," said

Marvis Carmichael of Star Toyota, who endured the afternoon sun to provide more than 500 hot dogs, a Fourth of July favorite.



"Judging by the assorted entertainment and the cultural blend of the crowd, this year's event was the most popular."

Beyond food, many contractor organizations went the extra step to get involved and share their diversity. Wyle Life Sciences, in addition to sharing hand-spun cotton candy, displayed a world map with pins indicating where

employees had descended from – which ranged from Argentina to Greenland to Syria.

Cimarron took a creative approach, inviting children to design quilt squares that depicted future Mars exploration.

"We wanted to give something back to the committee for next year's event and the quilt was an excellent medium in doing so," said Liza Abbey, community outreach manager. "The quilt reflects the past while Mars reflects our future tied into the theme perfectly."

For many, celebrating American heritage was a family affair and a terrific way to celebrate the upcoming holiday.

Rick Stiles, Lockheed Martin, had full participation from his family, including three daughters donned in pioneer girl attire.



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"Our heritage is what's passed down to us from the people before us," explained Elissa Stiles, 8.

"We are very strong-minded about preserving our heritage," said Lisa Stiles, Elissa's mother. "We studied the Constitution in preparation for the Fourth of July. It's important to me that the girls understand that people came to this country for a reason and to hold onto our past. I think this event is great at reinforcing that. Our daughters are amazed by what they are seeing here today."

Similarly, Greg J. Della Longa, JSC Institutional Procurement Office team lead, brought his daughters to the event hoping to emphasize their heritage and increase awareness of others.

"We are very proud of our Italian heritage, and every chance I get, I share that with



my children," said Della Longa. "Through events like this and the Houston Italian Festival downtown – the girls get a better understanding of our heritage."

The afternoon's activities were kicked off in festive style with an outdoor performance by the Forest Brook

High School Marching Band filling the JSC mall area with uplifting Independence Day tunes.

The band then led a parade featuring decorated cars, antiques and conventional

alike, horse buggies and trailriders around the JSC site. Friday's event was the finale

to an entire week of special lunchtime entertainers in the Bldg. 3 cafeteria.

"This year's event was a great success," said Estella Hernandez Gilette, director of Equal Opportunity Programs. "American Heritage Week is about increasing awareness of our diversity while helping us work better as a team.

The more than 1,000 people who came out could see that in action with JSC civil servants working alongside contractors and other volunteers to make it a great celebration for all."

A diverse mix of performers entertained employees through the week and friends and family at the Grand Finale event. Shown here, clockwise from the top, are a cultural dancer with Egyptian Folklore; the Forest Brook High School Marching Band parading through the JSC mall area; a Japanese dancer from Showing Japan; a Celtic musician with Clan Ceili, and 10-year-old country and western singer, Ashley Toman.

NASA JSC Photos by Robert Markowitz and James Blair

